

'Communist Dominoes Are Falling'

Ronald Reagan, in a commencement address Friday at Louisiana State University in Baton Rouge:

Let me tell you the basis of my optimism for our future. What has made the United States great is that ours has been an empire of ideals. The ideals of freedom, democracy, and a belief in the remarkable potential of the individual. Power isn't simply wealth or troops. Power is also spirit and ideas. And these we have in abundance.

The attitude of wanting to be the biggest and to go the farthest and to get there first and to do the most good when we arrived is part of our national character. Americans have always been larger than life. We wanted to establish the best government on Earth. We wanted to put a man on the moon. This is the spirit we set loose. This is the passion that invented revolutionary technologies and a culture young people everywhere envy.

And this is the attitude that has defeated communism. At some dark, lonely moment during the last decade, a terrible realization set in upon the leaders of the Soviet Union. They realized that their system could not take them where the United States and the rest of the free world was going.

The West's economics and technologies

were a powerful booster blasting us into orbits the communist world could not hope to reach. Our communications technology sailed over the barbed wire and concrete walls, letting their citizens know what democracy could offer, what free markets could provide. Our computer technology left them bewildered and behind, paper societies in an electronic age.

I believe President Gorbachev realized the United States and West were turbocharged for the future and pulling farther and farther away. He could not slow down the rest of the world; his only hope was to speed up change within the Soviet Union.

Gorbachev is grappling with historic and bitter ethnic tensions where seething memories, not reason, prevail. He's overwhelmed by an economy so defeated that food rots at the sides of the fields because there's no transportation to market. He faces a bureaucracy that for 70 years has smothered every spark of innovation or initiative. I genuinely hope my friend succeeds against the problems arrayed against him.

What must we do in these times of change and uncertainty? We must simply do what we've always done—remain true to our ideals. And those are the ideals of freedom and democracy.

I wholeheartedly encourage the hopes of the Baltic peoples who wish to be free to run their own countries. I celebrate their bravery. The captive nations of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia were invaded by the Soviet Union. They have been held against their will since 1940 when Hitler and Stalin made a pact. Ladies and Gentlemen, no pact made by Hitler and Stalin should prevail today. The Baltic countries and their peoples should be free!

Communist dominoes are falling all over the world. We must continue to give communist dominoes a good push whenever and wherever we can. There are still those that must fall—China, North Korea, North Vietnam, North Yemen, and, of course, Cuba. Cuba is next in democracy's sweep. And let me say directly to Fidel Castro—like Honecker in East Germany, like Ceausescu in Romania, like Noriega in Panama, like all the other has-been dictators of despair, you cannot fight democracy's destiny. Fidel, you're finished!

... We should not be timid in our embrace of democracy. We should be as bold and brash in our democratic ideals as ever in our history. The Golden Age of Freedom is near because America has remained true to her ideals. This is not the time to let our support for democracy wane.

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